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## Oral History Interview: Numa Dale Milles

Numa Dale Milles

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# RELEASE FORM

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This interview was conducted on December 30, 1999 w/ my grandfather Numa Dale Mills in his home in Hinton, West Virginia. Mr. Mills, age 79, is a life long resident of WV w/ some brief periods spent in other states working while coal mining work was down. Mr. Mills speaks of some life adventures, trials in the mines, ethnography of the coal fields and also teaches a sermon or two in the interview.

GRANDFATHER: -- Two stills from the neighbors is because he knew that the police were coming after him the next day. My uncle, one of the them, he was working the still in the house on the stove. My dad was working the stills in the barn. And they had six, 60 gallon barrels of mash to make whiskey out of that night. And I was pumping another still that was using gasoline in the smoke house

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And I think all together that we --that night we brewed 75 gallons of pure whisky.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: The next day here comes six car loads of --

JOHN: Revenuers?

GRANDFATHER: -- Revenuers, State Police, and then county police. My dad knew they was coming so he dug a ditch about that wide and about three foot deep going across the creek.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: So, the road went across the creek. When the first car came through, it dropped down in there and the old timer cars in 1930 --20 --1920 some model cars would spring going cross it.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: And it broke the springs. So, there they set.

JOHN: Couldn't get nowhere, huh?

GRANDFATHER: They didn't find no whiskey because dad had took it off of our farm and the only thing they found was two pieces of copper that went to make the still, which wasn't



enough to arrest him.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: Another time the police was coming, my mother -- there was five gallon can of whiskey that dad had left there that he had sold to somebody that was supposed to come after it and here come the police. Mother saw them coming. She took the can and was standing out in the yard holding it upside down running the whisky out of it. About the time they got to her, they knocked it out of her hands, but it was too late. The last drop had done run. So, they didn't have no evidence. Then --life started pretty early as far as working or something like that because I went with my aunt to peddle coal from the farm to the coal fields, which was called slump And we peddled had at spring company store to and over in that area for a long time, about four or five years. And I started at seven years of age. Being a knowledgeable kid about Christmas, my mother said, "David, money, some of it belongs to you from gathering walnuts and stuff, said, you buy the Christmas candy." So, at the spring company store, I bought Christmas Candy. I didn't know what kind of candy to buy. So, I bought seven boxes of chocolate covered cherries, which at that time cost 29 cent a pound --box. And I really got kidded over that. So, the next time I knew what kind of candy to buy. But I loved living with my grandparents when I was just a kid. And the first thing that I remember as a kid as far as automobiles is concerned was in 1925. They always asked me what kind of car was that and I said it was a damn old Ford. That's all I knew was a damn old forward. And my dad, he owned cars from the time that I can remember until he left in 1931. He didn't own a car then until I started working coal mines at 18 years of age. During my life I've had an awful lot of fun. I've had experiences that --some of them were pretty rough, but the ones that I like to think of is one with my older brother. He taught me how to smoke. He taught me to drink whisky. He taught me that if he ever caught me

with anyone else drinking or smoking that he would kick my butt. And he taught me especially how to cuss, which I learned. I was an a pretty good student.

JOHN: Was that ???

GRANDFATHER: And then my younger brother, one younger, you always have tragedies in families and we had our share, I think. My older brother was killed in the coal mines. A brother younger than me, ten years, him and his five year old son drowned at the same time while he was in the service. And in this family there was born 11 children. To this day, four remain, two boys and two girls. Our lives have been one of many experiences, both good and bad. But we speak an awful lot about our environment. What we're concerned about. And today among us, even in the paper is always something about mountain top stripping, coal mines. People seem to disregard or can't remember or don't think about it, but the earth itself takes care of itself. In the 1940's and 19 -- late 1930's and the early 40's they started strip mining. That left scars in our mountains. But during that time people didn't think of the environment or what caused or how much damage it would do, but it always righted itself. But it seems that the people that have the run of this country now can't seem to remember that they left their lakes where these strip grades were at. And the people themselves --the DNR didn't do it nor neither did the people connected with any state institution or anything, they didn't do it, but the people themselves stocked these ponds with fish.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And you could go and people caught fish out of it. They swam in these little lakes, these little made lakes. And then some bright politician got the idea that it was all wrong. And, so, they took and sent in bulldozers and this, that and the other, landscaped it out, for all the ponds out, and that changed the environment a little bit more. That caused really

the earth not to take any stuff. The earth takes care of itself.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: Well, why can't we remember that? Well, I do. As a little boy, I remember the earth does more than I can understand. I love life. And I've got some good people. I've had people that were older than me that were rough, but still yet, they would give you anything they owned --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: -- if you needed it. But to buck them, they would fight. And I can't understand why that the people of this country can't seem to think that the people themselves could take care of their homes, but they're not allowed.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: The law turns that around backwards.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: We are suppose to be a free people, my thoughts, my way of living, as I have lived. I'll be 80 years old in 11 more days. And during that time I have learned the thoughts of war, the acts of war and living and participating in a war. The ill, the dead, the harm that it causes even to individuals and nations and people. But in all of these things, I am not troubled because of them because they are to be, yet I think I wouldn't want my children, my children's children, grandchildren to go through a war such as I had seen in foreign countries. People don't realize the hurt, the bad, the good that even comes from it. But starvation hurts the little, the young, seems to outweigh people's minds and they pay no attention to the cries of others. We're a people in this country that say we're free. But we are not. We are subject to the rules, the laws, statutes and judgments of this country, which in these last years to me has run

them up. People change. Lives change. But we are not changed.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: Just our thoughts can all be changed. I love my little fellows that I call grandchildren. To me they're a blessing. I'm proud. I'm not over proud. But I am thankful. Life goes on whether I have part or not. But I love to have part with my family, their causes when they hurt, I hurt. I love to see education fought for in a manner that they learn the essence of life. How it is to be lived and why it should be lived. Not as some of the others that seem to take advantage and say it is my way or else. Think of what freedom is. What if I want breakfast every morning? I'm free to fix what I want, all of those things. I'm free to go fishing, but if I use the wrong things in going fishing, then I am subject to the laws that they put down on it. When I was a boy, there were no laws.

JOHN: Did you catch how many you want?

GRANDFATHER: I catch how many I wanted, where I wanted and didn't have to have a license to --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: --catch. But now it has become, not so much as a sport or for food. People done it for food mostly then. Now it is done for the revenue that you receive from it, which has become a great, great institution of learning.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: People want to keep these things up. And they do good. They do do good. They keep a life. They have brought back many things that are --were deteriorating away or losing ????. But we as a people, I think will go on --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: --walking the course of life, giving instruction, receiving, and above all, loving people. People are our lives.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: And if we lose them, there's nothing left.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: People are afraid of --say tomorrow -- this is the day before the last day of the year. People are afraid of it. I'm not.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: I have one philosophy. That's God.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: He is our creator.

JOHN: How long have you been a preacher?

GRANDFATHER: I've been a preacher for 45 years.

JOHN: How many people have you married? You counted it up on day, didn't you?

GRANDFATHER: Oh, I don't --I have no idea.

JOHN: I thought you all counted it up one day.

GRANDFATHER: And we--

GRANDMOTHER: Way over a 100.

JOHN: Way over a 100?

GRANDFATHER: I think it's a hundred and fifty some before this year --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: --we counted it. And funerals, I don't have any idea. And been in a lot of baptisms. And I have a funeral-- I'll be participating in a funeral tomorrow, the first day of

the year.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: I don't know, being a minister is something I don't feel worthy of, but yet I have received great joy in this and peace, especially, peace and contentment of my mind and soul. It causes me to look at others and try in some measure or another to feel their hurt, their joy, and if it's joy, I love to rejoice with them.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: When a couple is married, I always think --it's my hope that they will live together in harmony and peace. But we know that from the beginning of marriages that this hasn't been so. There will be discontentment, things that cause dissension, loss of love, many things to cause a couple--and it's all summed up in one word which comes from the scriptures -- through the hardness of their hearts, divorcement is given. But to love all things, exist, all things conform to love, understanding, everything that's good.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And it tries to right the bad. And being a minister, it's hard. Sometimes your heart hurts you so bad when you conduct funerals or something or someone is sick and you're called. These things bother you. But yet through it all, you can't take one ??? of life that you've live in that category for anything. And to go on, I hope to walk in life before men and God in a way that I'm not ashamed that feels free to walk.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: I want my children to hold my hand. I need it. My grandchildren -- "Grand dad, come on, let's go." I'll go. I've tried to teach, to learn that which is right. I've not been a good man. I've done bad things. But overall, don't make any difference, some people say

that the good will never, every outweigh the bad, but I say the good has always outweighed the bad.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: There's good in everyone. But there's also bad in everyone.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: We--I don't know, we tend to try to make people believe what we believe. We tend to argue, which I don't think is a good manner of doing things. But sometimes --I have in the past because of statements made --become angry. And yet, I find that to be angry is not so bad, but what I do while I'm angry --

JOHN: Is bad.

GRANDFATHER: --That's what causes the bad.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: So, all in all, I think that life is good. It's been fruitful and has borne fruit towards making a good for the people around me and to be helped with good from all people.

JOHN: When did you all move to Hinton?

GRANDFATHER: Do what?

JOHN: When did you all move down here?

GRANDFATHER: Well, lets see. We move down here 32 years ago. We moved here 32 years.

JOHN: Moved from Cleveland, or was it --

GRANDFATHER: We moved from John Ben.

JOHN: Over at John Bend?

GRANDFATHER: Yes, we moved from John Ben here. I worked up at Cleveland for about a few months but never did take the family. But we took the family in 1954 and moved to Staten Island, New York where we lived for two years. And during that time, the coal fields were down. There was no sales for coal. So, there was a slump in coal selling. And then the boom came again, and I was called back to the coal mines in 1956. And I worked the coal mines for -- til --for 25 years. And I contacted black lung. And in 1959 I was diagnosed with black lung and they awarded it to me in 1960. But I didn't receive benefits from it until 1975 when I quit working construction.

JOHN: 15 years, huh?

GRANDFATHER: So, I had 25 years in the coal mine. I started work when I was 18 years old and worked until I was 55 off and on.

JOHN: Uh-huh. What did you do while you were in Long Island?

GRANDFATHER: I worked as a mechanic -- for a year-and-a half as a mechanic in a color making factory to make base colors for paint --

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: -- and all such as that.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And they had -- they made a special green that was used to for making money, making --

JOHN: To print money?

GRANDFATHER: --Paper money.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And then the timber of the warehouse that we had --we had to have a



big warehouse because they had the part where it had all of the stuff that was used from steel bolts up to great big stem valves, sarco valves, all kind of things that went along with making color. And they used a lot of acid, especially very high potent acid, sulfuric and all that. And then tanks had to be made in lead-lined tank.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And then the man died that was the overseer of that. So, I become the warehouse operator.

JOHN: Foreman?

GRANDFATHER: And I had to order all the parts and distribute them, all -- everything that ever -- bolt from a little screw up to a (inaudible) steel, which resisted acid. And I worked there until I got the call back to the coal mine. Then I worked ten more years in the coal mines and then it went down and I went to work construction. Worked that until I retired in 1975.

JOHN: Other than your brother, did you have anybody close that died in the mines? Any friends or --

GRANDFATHER: Yes, I had a nephew by marriage that was killed in the mines at John Ben. And then I had -- in that mine I had a nephew was killed, and I had two more friends that were killed. One was slate fall. One was caught between two railroad cars and --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: --killed. Another one was killed at -- run way trip that jerked a horse over top of him and killed him.

JOHN: Hmm.

GRANDFATHER: So, all together, my worst experience that I had as far as mines was when I was 19 years old I had been working in the mines just about a year, and I worked with my

dad loading coal, what you call then --it was hand loading. They didn't have machinery in the mines whenever I started. And the dirt man got killed. He was cupeling up a car and the motorman was backing up long string of coal cars. And he was to cupeling them up and stood between them. Whenever he stepped up on the bumper to -- and they was coming backwards to make the connection, his knees slipped off the bumper and it jerked him down under the car, and the motorman couldn't see him because it was around a curve.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And he knew something was wrong. So he stopped. But he didn't get stopped until the man was under the fourth car. And, of course, he wasn't dead when we got him out. But that was my first experience in the mines. And then when we got him out and loaded him on the stretcher and took him outside, the mine foreman looked at me and said, "Little man, you're elected to work on the motor the rest of the night. And that was hard for me to do.

JOHN: I bet.

GRANDFATHER: And then he died on the way to the hospital. So, from then on, I have done everything in the mines, I reckon. I've run a motor. I've broke, what they call brakeman on --gathering the cars. I've worked on conveyers. I've run coal cutting machines. Running coal cutting machine was the last work that I did. And everything from supply mines with timbers and this, that and the other that needed to do the day or night's work, to laying track and even to face bossing.

JOHN: What's face bossing?

GRANDFATHER: That's being foreman of the —

JOHN: Of the --

GRANDFATHER: --individual drive section.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: And usually machine man in that and you had to -- machine man had to know how to take readings with a lamp that was used for to test for gas. And you would learn all those things and then tell if there was gas or if there was no air, what you call black paint.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: And we cut into a place, and I stuck the lamp up in the hole and it jerked it out, which it was black paint, no oxygen period.

JOHN: No oxygen.

GRANDFATHER: It was dead. The air was dead. And if you've get in that, one breath and that's all.

JOHN: That's all it takes?

GRANDFATHER: That's your last.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: And, so, we blocked that off and then cut into it another place, and then they turned the air in it to drive it out.

JOHN: Ventilated it, huh?

GRANDFATHER: Uh-huh. And then went on, went on working. And I had slate on me, roof slate fall on me four times. Two times it would have been -- it would -- (End of tape) -- caused my death if there hadn't been men there --

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: -- to get it off of me. And all that. And then there's rules around the timber with the two-and-a-half ton coal cutting machine. And I don't know how that it done that or got out of it. But the man that saved my life that time to keep it from crushing and killing me

into the side of the face after it had me trapped was a fellow called Dewey Taylor, called him Dew. And he has since died. He was a little older than me -- a few years ago. And being a close friend, I was asked to conduct his funeral. The boy that saved my life twice is still living.

JOHN: Really?

GRANDFATHER: Edward Medders. A kittle bottomfell on me, which had me crushed down and had me in a conveyer line, steel conveyer line, which would have tore me all to pieces if I could have stayed down in it. And he got in under the piece of rock with me and then got his arms under me some way and lifted me up enough to keep the steel chain from grabbing me.

JOHN: From grabbing you?

GRANDFATHER: Uh-huh.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: And then another time a kittle bottom fell on me and it was partially stopped by a fresh cut of coal. But I couldn't move, couldn't get out from under it. And he got in under it again and --with me and threw his -- he was young, strong --

JOHN: Threw his back into it?

GRANDFATHER: And he got his back into it and he held it until the men got timbers in there under to hold it up enough for both of us to get out. And then another time, if there hadn't been men there, there was five men in the place and they saw the kittle bottom fall on me. It weighed about two-and-a-half-ton. And it had me in a pile of dust about three, four inches thick. Just dust piled up. And my mining cap, which was made out of fiber then, it busted it all to pieces and crushed it. And it was about that far from my head. It come off and the light cord left -- kept it from going to far.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And there was five of them that tried to lift the rock, and they couldn't lift it. And it was choking me to death.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: And then they --they got jacks and timbers and made pry bars out of it and lifted it up enough til one man got me by my feet --

JOHN: Pulled you out?

GRANDFATHER: -- and pulled me out. So, I've had some pretty narrow escapes.

JOHN: Had a couple brushes of death, huh?

GRANDFATHER: Uh-huh. And then in World War II I was aboard the USS Lipton, a cruiser. And we got in a mine field. And in that mine field there was three of the mines went off.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And then we stopped, and when we got stopped, there was two hanging on the bow and one on the stern still yet. And three days we were in that mine field waiting for a mine sweeper to clear all the mines out so we could get out.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: And during that time we were bombed three times. It was good that American planes was around enough -- close enough to --

JOHN: Keep them off of you?

GRANDFATHER: -- They could guard us. But the closest bomb that hit was about 50-foot from the ship.

JOHN: You were a gunner's mate?

GRANDFATHER: I was a gunner's mate.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: But we weren't aloud to shoot, because if we would've started shooting --

JOHN: Rock the boat?

GRANDFATHER: -- It would vibrate the boat and set the them --I mean, the ship and set them mines off. You wasn't even aloud to hit the bulkhead with a hammer or anything like that because vibration —

JOHN: Vibration?

GRANDFATHER: --would be enough -- that's all it would take.

JOHN: I bet those were a nervous few days, huh?

GRANDFATHER: And we sat there for them days, just like sitting duck.

JOHN: Laugh.

GRANDFATHER: And we had Axis Sally--that's one thing about the whole thing, she knew the ship was on, called it by name, told where it was at and how many men was on it and told us, oh, you'll not get to see your girlfriends or your mother or nothing because we're going to get you tonight.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: So we did have --we did have bombing raids two or three times. But Axis Sally's predictions didn't come quite true.

JOHN: Not quite true. That's pretty good.

GRANDFATHER: But there one night we was in such a bombing raid and HMS, which was a British cruiser —

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: -- It was sunk. They sank two hospital ships that were lit up like a Christmas tree.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: It had lights all over it. It was a Christmas tree. They bombed two of them.

JOHN: Bombed them anyway, huh?

GRANDFATHER: Bombed them and sank them off the coast of Anzio, Italy. It was during the Anzio Italy invasion.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And that British cruiser, two hospital ships, four LST's, which was landing craft tankers --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: --They had equipment and men both on them --

JOHN: Were they --

GRANDFATHER: -- For invasion. And then two American destroyers was sank.

JOHN: Sunk?

GRANDFATHER: And then -- But I think all in all war is a terrible thing. But even today I would say this, I would rather go over there and fight than to see it happen --

JOHN: On U. S. soil?

GRANDFATHER: --to people here because it's -- it is devastating. I think it's hard to see a family --cities like Polaris Italy, this was in. And the garbage that we put out on the docks from the foods and all of scraps and everything --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: -- I could see men, women and children

JOHN: Digging through it, huh?

GRANDFATHER: -- digging through garbage cans for something to eat. So, but life's been good. I think it's still good.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: Perhaps the good Lord will allow me to live a few more years, and if not, I'm not gonna battle it.

JOHN: Laugh. So you had five kids and thirteen grandchildren. And how many great grandchildren are you up to?

GRANDMOTHER: So far, 11.

JOHN: 11 great grandchildren. All right.

GRANDFATHER: My dad --

GRANDMOTHER: Some of them is dead.

GRANDFATHER: -- I don't expect to have as many as he did.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: My father had 11 children, and when he died at the age of 91, nearly 92, he had 135 direct descendants. That was children, children's children, children's children's children and children's children's children's children.

JOHN: Laugh.

GRANDFATHER: Had five generations.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: He had five sets of five generations when he died. I don't think I will have that many.



JOHN: I don't think were going to run a --

GRANDFATHER: No, I've got too many that don't believe in big families.

JOHN: Laugh.

GRANDFATHER: I reckon my children have done quit.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: All I want to depend on is great grandchildren's children -- grandchildren. But it's enough.

JOHN: Yes. It's plenty.

GRANDFATHER: And it's --I think that it's a wonderful thing, a good thing that a man, as the scripture says, that his --it says "The joy of an old man --I mean a young man -- is his strength. But the glory of an old man is his children's children." So if a man has joy in his children's children, regardless of how many generation, maybe it would be like Job, gotten to the fourth generation on his knee. Now, that would be nice to do.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: But whether that it would come or not, three generations is pretty good.

JOHN: Yes, not bad. Not bad at all, really.

GRANDFATHER: So life will go on, but yet, man changes. In my lifetime, I've seen it go from an old truck chain driven rear end.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: Up to now Lord knows what all they've got in them. But there's a vast difference.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: And from --well, the airplane was before I was born, but not much.

JOHN: Not long before?

GRANDFATHER: They weren't --they wasn't too famous. And since World War II there has been a drastic change in aviation. And also --

JOHN: Automobiles?

GRANDFATHER: Automobiles. Also in ships --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: --that travel the ocean. They take --got a submarine now that can go under water and stay there for --

JOHN: About a year, I think, isn't it?

GRANDFATHER: Well, it just keeps on staying.

JOHN: Yes. Those nuclear subs.

GRANDFATHER: They can manufacture, I think, some way or another oxygen or already of it to where they mix it with something, pills and they've got air.

JOHN: Hmm.

GRANDFATHER: But we don't even know what man has got figured out. But one thing I do know, man sure does know how to make things to kill himself with.

JOHN: Yes. How did you feel about, you know, during World War II when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima?

GRANDFATHER: It was a bad thing, but I think that it -- even though as many lives as it did kill, I think that it saved lives.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: I think that it was a necessary evil to show man that it can destroy

himself. And man has got the capability now have destroying whole cities easily.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: And to do that -- you take New York City where it's got six million and some people in it now --

JOHN: Yes. Just like that.

GRANDFATHER: And within seconds, it could be done away with. That's a terrible thing to think in your mind or know. And we know that they're capable of it -- of doing such a thing. And some mad man will start something like that.

JOHN: Yes. You were a teenager through the depression, weren't you?

GRANDFATHER: Yes, once one time -- during all through the depression we lived on a farm. So, actually, for food we didn't suffer none.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: But I don't know, I'd say that we had plenty to eat. We grew it ourselves.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: We could grow everything that was needed. We grew wheat for flour. We grew buckwheat for pancake flour out of it. We grew our own corn for meal. We grew our own vegetables. We canned them. We had berries -- berries on the farm of all types that would grow in this country, blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries and strawberries and all them make jams and jellies and all of that and corn and everything could be canned. And you would take beef, pork, chickens, all farm life animals that you use to eat such as that could be canned.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: Or either you could put it up in --

JOHN: Up in a smoke house?

GRANDFATHER: -- What was called a salt cure or smoked cure --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: -- Or whatever to keep it through winter months to live on. And it -- the only ones that suffered in which we knew of because we had a lot of our things stolen sometimes, food steal -- people come and still food. But I don't think any of us lived in any city that was suffered to death. Not to my knowledge. And being a young person whenever it started, say, in 1928, actually, it -- it pretty soon started, 27 or eight. Being about seven or eight years old, I understood a little bit about it. But the reason for peddling at the coal camps was the only time we had to buy was sugar, salt, baking powder and soda.

JOHN: The only things you couldn't raise yourself, huh?

GRANDFATHER: That was the only things we couldn't make ourselves.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: Now, there's -- we would get honey. We did. We had bees. We had honey. Of course, we wouldn't have had to bought sugar. We could have cooked with honey. And then making molasses and things like that. You had your own syrup, everything like that. You could use it, too, to sweeten -- like make cakes and all that, different things you use it for, sweeten berries or -- but sugar wasn't actually something that you really had to have because you could do without it because the things that you had and raised --

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: --It was sweet.

JOHN: Natural sweeteners?

GRANDFATHER: Yes. You take maple syrup. We had several on the farm -- we had several trees on there and it was sugar maple. And we would tap them every spring and get water from them and make juice and make -- we would make brown sugar. We would made syrup, maple syrup. We would can it. It would keep. Anything to learn to do things. And soap. We made our own soap. We made it out of rootash and --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: -- acid and animal fats. You made your soap.

JOHN: Made your own soap. Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: People can survive. All they have to do is to have a little bit of knowledge and what --

JOHN: Just remember how it use to be?

GRANDFATHER: Yes. And you take our forefathers, they learned to do that.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And now we don't know it.

JOHN: Got a generation that didn't have to do it.

GRANDFATHER: Yes.

JOHN: They had everything supplied for them?

GRANDFATHER: Future generation like it is now, I would say they turn people loose now, other than if they were older, and have had to do that before, that it would take them a while to--

JOHN: Yes. Have to learn all over again.

GRANDFATHER: They would have to learn it over again.

JOHN: I think we covered just about everything, haven't we?

GRANDFATHER: That gets about -- a pretty good bit of the state of life.

JOHN: Laugh.

GRANDFATHER: All I would like to tell -- experience that I had -- worked in the coal mines about a year. And I bought a 1934 Plymouth.

JOHN: Uh-huh..

GRANDFATHER: And that Plymouth, we used it to go to work. It was about 10 miles to where the mines was at work, a place called Tommy's Creek at the head of Devil's Fork. And that coal was carried from the mines to the railroad track, which was about four-and-a-half, five-mile trip around the mountains to the railroad tracks and they tipped over -- they dump it.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: And it was a dinky train. A 35 ton dinky.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And one night snowing and slick, the winds blowing, there was six of us in this '34 Plymouth that road it to work. And we couldn't make it up a bank on the road. And some them said, "Well, there's no more trains tonight so go to the tracks." So, we started around the tracks and they had decided that while we were coming from the mine to send another train in. And, so, on a blind curve we met this dinky with 45 cars behind it.

JOHN: Oh, boy.

GRANDFATHER: And I saw it and I was driving. I was just a young man. I was 19 -- 18, 19 years old. And I put that Plymouth in reverse and backed up the tracks as fast as it would go, but I couldn't out run it. It caught me. And whenever it -- before it hit, all of the occupants of the car but me jumped out. And as they jumped out to roll over the --

JOHN: Bank?

GRANDFATHER: --Bank, why the engineer on it told the brakeman that he had on there -- Jack Bryant was the engineer and then Mark ??? was the brakeman. He said, "Mark, let's stop and get the steaks we've killed a cow." So one of the men rolled over the hill and they thought they had hit a cow

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: They said, "Lets kill the cow and get the steaks off of it anyway.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: Save the steaks off the cow So he stopped. And when he got stopped, I was straight up and down the high wall on the cattle catcher in that '34 Plymouth.

JOHN: Laugh.

GRANDFATHER: I couldn't get out. And I got out and looked, my God, "Any of you dead?" And one by one everybody was picking their selves off the ground. "No, ain't dead yet." So, it turned out none of us was hurt. But they had to cut the train up for it to release the car --

JOHN: Get the car?

GRANDFATHER: -- so I could get out.

JOHN: Laugh. Did it still run?

GRANDFATHER: Huh?

JOHN: Did the car still run?

GRANDFATHER: Well, we pulled everything out from -- away from the motor until it would run.

JOHN: Really?

GRANDFATHER: And we had to pour water in it all the way home to keep it --

JOHN: Radiator?

GRANDFATHER: Yes. The radiator was busted. The frame was broken in three places and the bumper was broke and the wheels was sitting cockeyed, but it could be driven.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: Just barely could, about five or six mile an hour.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: That was better than walking.

JOHN: Laugh.

GRANDFATHER: And drove it the rest of the way home. And that was one time I thought that was the end of me.

JOHN: That would have been something to go around that curve and see that train.

GRANDFATHER: The headlight struck me right in the face and for an instant, I froze.

JOHN: (Inaudible)

GRANDFATHER: If I could have reacted --

JOHN: Quicker, you --

GRANDFATHER: -- quicker, I might could have got away from it, but I doubt it. It's very doubtful to get away from it.

JOHN: That's pretty good.

GRANDFATHER: And that was one time that I was scared.

JOHN: Laugh. Just a little bit, huh?

GRANDFATHER: Yes, a little.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: And that -- then I bought a model Ford, 1930 model, a model Ford. And as we was coming around -- of course, it was mostly dirt roads back then. What you had



was just narrow, hard roads, one lane hard roads --

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: --back then. If you've a path that was the main roads. But we didn't have any blacktop roads to run on, just all of them was dirt roads. And it narrow it was very narrow. The road was very narrow. And I met a fellow called Henry Mann coming up the hill out of a place called Willovette and I was coming down. And we met in a very narrow place on that road. Well, he come up the bank -- like that -- and his car was setting on an angle and mine went over the bank. And there happened to be a hickory tree, I'd say about eight, ten inches in diameter, up about ten-foot --

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And that car hit that tree dead center about 15, 20-foot up it.

JOHN: And was stuck?

GRANDFATHER: And it went --the car, tree and all went way over like that. And it was a hickory tree and they don't bust very easy. They spring. And it sprung that car right back in the road. And that's one accident I'd say was a miracle.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: There was six of us in it and it threw us right back up in the road. We stopped. Of course, we had to stop because I was too nervous to drive.

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: Went we went back and talked to Henry Mann to see if he was hurt. And he wasn't hurt, but we had to take and lift his car up--

JOHN: Right.

GRANDFATHER: -- and slide it off the side of the bank. It was on the bank like that

laying on its side.

JOHN: Huh. So, you went off the road and it hit dead center and sprung you back?

GRANDFATHER: Hit dead center of that tree and the tree sprung us back in the road.

JOHN: That's luck.

GRANDFATHER: That is. That there really is a piece of luck that -- I don't know where you could do it again.

JOHN: I don't think you could.

GRANDFATHER: It was something.

JOHN: No doubt.

GRANDFATHER: And I have been driving ever since and I've never had a bad wreck. On icy roads back then slid into a car, which cost \$500 damage was the worst wreck I ever had.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: But yet, on slick roads I've turned around three times going down a mountain and still yet straighten up without wrecking. So, I've been pretty fortunate --

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: -- driving automobiles.

JOHN: Of course, you used to get your motorcycle up to about 100 miles an hour standing on the seat.

GRANDFATHER: Oh, now, motorcycles, I was pretty bad with them. That was before I was married. I did big 80, Harley Davison, big black one. Registered a 140 mile an hour. And through Cherry Creek Dip, I pegged that thing. Eventually went past 140 mile an hour plumb to the peg.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: Now, that was moving.

JOHN: Yes. That was going --

GRANDFATHER: And I have rode motorcycles standing on people's shoulders, standing on my head on the fenders of a motorcycle, standing on the running board, what they call foot boards on a motorcycle, one on one side and one on -- one driving at the gas and the other one using the brake. And I've stood on people's shoulders. Done everything on a motorcycle.

JOHN: Bad.

GRANDFATHER: Laugh.

JOHN: Should have been a stunt man.

GRANDFATHER: Oh, it -- and back then I really had good balance. I had to have to do that.

JOHN: Right

GRANDFATHER: And I reckon the stupidest thing I ever done was after I was married in about 1947 or '48, had about two children then, Skip, your father and Keith. And we were all coming to the river on a big Ford truck that my father-in-law had, and as we was going down White Oak mountain, this man drove up in a -- I think it was a '47 Plymouth, I believe. And he drove up behind the truck -- and he was minister, too, he was a preacher.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And while he was doing all that kind of stuff then, I don't know. But he pulled up behind me and I let on like I was going to step off on his hood. He said -- he stuck his head out the window -- you know, we weren't going very fast down that mountain, say maybe 15, anywhere from ten to 15 mile an hour geared down -- He said, "Go ahead. Step off on it."

So, whenever he pulled up there, then that time I stepped off on the hood of that car off of that truck. Well, I sat down and I quit because he put his brakes on and slowed down. It scared him. And then it took three tries for him to get back up there, close enough for me --

JOHN: So you --

GRANDFATHER: -- to step back up on the truck. And I actually stepped back on.

Now, that was stupid.

JOHN: Yes. It was if you knew at the time.

GRANDFATHER: It was -- that truck was loaded with people.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: So, I've done quite a few crazy things, but I believe that was the craziest.

JOHN: Laugh.

GRANDFATHER: There was an old colored woman -- told Marie that the good Lord takes care of fools and drunks. Said they have to.

JOHN: Laugh.

GRANDFATHER: I was drinking at that time.

JOHN: Laugh. So, you were both? You were both foolish and drinking?

GRANDFATHER: I was pretty well loaded.

JOHN: Laugh. In the coal camps and everything, were there a lot of -- like foreign families and everything?

GRANDFATHER: Yes, there was -- there was always -- well, you had -- when we lived there at Jon Ben, there was Spanish, Italian. And of course, there was other nationalities of people that -- about all the people -- a lot of people come -- back then come to the coal camps for

-- to make a living. Even Swedes and Italians. Back then it was most Italian and Spanish that come. And the family that lived next to us was the Salvos. They were Spanish. And these people still yet -- now, this was in the 30's -- they made their own bread. They were --

JOHN: Oh, did they?

GRANDFATHER: Uh-huh. And she was a type of a woman -- she couldn't speak English, but she would make a loaf of bread every week and give one to my mother and one to one of our neighbors, which is the cousin, was Agee. Also did-- made homemade all their stuff for. So, there were a lot of people who would come and couldn't even speak English, some of them. And I worked with Salvos, Sanchez, Deeds and Calvos. And they were all Spanish, Italian. And we had some Norwegian, people that are -- just about any nationality that would come to the coal fields to work back in that day. So, yes, it was a mixture of people --

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: -- throughout.

JOHN: I can't think of hardly anything else to talk about.

GRANDFATHER: Well, I've talked about -- a little about everything, I guess. One thing that they always indicate now -- they have for the last 47 years. I just specifically believe in salvation by the grace of God.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: I leave it all up to him, in other words, everything is in his hands. I don't have any --

JOHN: Anything to do with it?

GRANDFATHER: -- anything to do with it.

JOHN: Just pass his message on?

GRANDFATHER: All I can do is live the best life that I can according to his commandments. That's all I can do.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And trust him for the rest of it.

JOHN: All right. Well --

*End*

GRANDFATHER: -- Two ??? from the neighbors is because he knew that the police were coming after him the next day. My uncle, one of the them, he was working the ??? in the house on the stove. My dad was working the ??? in the barn. And they had six, 60 gallon barrels of mash to make whiskey out of that night. And I was pumping another ??? that was using ??? gasoline in the ???

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: And I think all together that we --that night we brewed 75 gallons of pure whisky.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANDFATHER: The next day here comes six car loads of --

JOHN: Revenuers?

GRANDFATHER: -- Revenuers, State Police, and then county police. My dad knew they was coming so he dug a ditch about that wide and about three foot deep going across the creek.

JOHN: Uh-huh.

GRANDFATHER: So, the road went across the creek. When the first car came through, it dropped down in there and the old timer cars in 1930 --20 --1920 some model cars would spring going cross it.